Bob: Which prayer do you pray more often: "Thank you, Lord," or "Bless me, Lord"? Here is Gary Thomas.

Gary: We live in an age where we’re told to seek blessing after blessing—“God to increase this, and God to increase that.” The Bible does, on occasion, in a couple of places, urge us to pray those prayers—that's a biblical prayer—but there are dozens of places where the Bible urges us to open our eyes to the blessings we've already received. Instead of always praying for more blessings, say, "God, thank You for the many ways You've already blessed us."

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, November 27th, Thanksgiving Day. Our host is the president of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We're going to talk today about how we can cultivate a heart of genuine gratitude. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Thursday edition. It is Thanksgiving Day, here in the United States.

I need to start off, right now, by just apologizing to our Canadian listeners because, awhile back, I made a reference to the fact that they don't celebrate Thanksgiving in Canada; and I heard from a listener who said they have their own Thanksgiving Day. They don't celebrate it the same day we celebrate it, here in the United States, so it’s not Thanksgiving Day today in Canada; but they do have a day set aside in Canada for Thanksgiving. I heard from listeners who wrote to me and said, "Shame on you."

Dennis: What day is Thanksgiving in Canada, Bob?

Bob: It's in October, and that's all I know. I don't know what day in October. Now, I'll probably get letters for that—thanks for bringing that up! [Laughter]
**Dennis:** We want our American friends to know that we are celebrating Thanksgiving along with you. This is a day when we'll all be gathered around—well, two tables. One table, at our house, that occurs, oh, about 10:30 or 11:00 in the morning; and then, later in the afternoon, after we've traveled a couple of hours south of here, we'll join Barbara's family. We'll go again around another table.

**Bob:** The first table is the French toast table; right?

**Dennis:** It's the French toast table, and Barbara always delights in Thanksgiving. In fact, this is her favorite holiday.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** She would rather have the family home for this day because she is not exhausted in preparing for it.

**Bob:** Right.

**Dennis:** It's a pretty simple day. We go through our little tradition that she's created around giving thanks for the top five things that God has done in our lives over the past 12 months. We share those—and then she collects them and saves them for future years so we can look back and reflect, at some future date. Then we dig into the French toast, and it's tasty. [Laughter]

**Bob:** The second table is the Big Bird table; right?

**Dennis:** It's the Big Bird table.

**Bob:** Have you ever had a turkey that you shot during turkey season for Thanksgiving?

**Dennis:** I have not.

**Bob:** Have you ever shot a turkey?

**Dennis:** I have.

**Bob:** Have you?

**Dennis:** But it's not during Thanksgiving—it's usually in the spring.
Bob: Oh, it is?

Dennis: Yes. You could take a turkey in Thanksgiving—it would be illegal. [Laughter]

Bob: Well, I'm glad to hear that you—

Dennis: You could go to prison for shooting a wild turkey at Thanksgiving.

Bob: —haven't had one of those for Thanksgiving in the past. [Laughter]

We're going to hear a message today on the subject of giving thanks. It comes from a guy who has been a regular guest, here on FamilyLife Today—Gary Thomas. Gary is the author of a great book on marriage called Sacred Marriage. He has written lots of other books. One of my favorites is a book he wrote called Sacred Pathways that's all about worship. Gary is on the pastoral staff at Second Baptist Church in Houston, Texas.

He sent me a message a while back that I think illustrates how we often take for granted the everyday blessings of God in our lives. So we thought, on Thanksgiving Day, we ought to pause and just reflect on God's goodness to us. Here is our friend, Gary Thomas.

[Recorded Message]

Gary: One of the early challenges my wife and I had, soon after we were married, was trying to find a compromise for our eating styles. I grew up the consummate junk food junkie—Captain Crunch, Big Mac®, pizza, and ice cream were sort of my four food groups all through college. I married a woman who is a natural health-food-eating, natural medicine-practicing woman, who eats 100 percent whole wheat bread and, well, you know, things that grow, and stuff like that.

We had a number of conflicts. I would say that the crisis point came when we had kids, and we were trying to deal it because then the intensity gets ratcheted up a little bit. And one morning in particular, my son put down his spoon during breakfast. He looked at my wife and said, "Mommy, how come Daddy's cereals have toys, and ours don't?" [Laughter] I had a hard time explaining that one.

Even today, we deal with this. We were up in Mt. Vernon—I'm sure many of you have been through there when they have a street festival every year. There were all these booths. And they have the woodworking, and they have the leatherworks, and the
artists have their paintings up there and all of that. We're going through all these booths. Then we came up to one. I just cringed because I knew Lisa would stop at it. It said, "Natural Organic Products." If you want to draw my wife's attention, slap "organic" on it and she is focused right in.

She goes up to the counter, and she picks up this bottle. I'm looking at this counter. There are two sort of granola-ish type women behind the counter—[Laughter]—I think you know the type I'm describing. My wife picks up this bottle of natural, organic deodorant for $10—Right Guard, $1.69 / natural organic deodorant, $10.

My wife is talking to her; and she says, "Well, what does it have in it that makes it work?" The woman smiled and said, "Grapefruit and sage." Lisa nods, and I'm off in the corner—I'm cracking up there, and I got Lisa a little upset. She was like, "Gary!!" I said: "Honey, I'm not trying to be a jerk, but I'd just really like to meet the guy who splits open a grapefruit for breakfast one morning and thinks to himself, 'You know, I wonder what would happen if I sprinkle a little sage in there, and I'm good for 12 to 14 hours.' Honey, it is food!" [Laughter]

But, you know, it is a historical blessing that my wife and I could even debate about what kind of food we eat because there have been many centuries when it's not a matter of what food there is to eat but whether there is any food to eat at all. That makes it particularly difficult for somebody like me this morning who is trying to talk about 1 Kings, Chapter 17, where you have a woman in a desperate situation.

There's a famine in the land—there's no food to be found—and trying to translate that on a Sunday morning when all of us probably passed a dozen restaurants and any number of grocery stores or convenience stores full of food. How can we fully understand the depths of her need?

But here is a widow in Zarephath, in the time of Elijah, who is already a widow. That already tells you she's known her share of sorrow. She's watched her husband die, and now there is no more food left for her and her son in the house. She's planning to make one last meal, knowing that she will soon watch her son starve to death. I can't even imagine the fear that must be in this woman.

Then Elijah comes through town. He calls out to the widow; and he says, "Please, please, give me a drink of water." She draws some water from the well and gives it to him. He says, "And if you would, make a cake for me." That's when she tells him, here—1 Kings, Chapter 17, you can read with me in verse 12. She says, "As surely as the Lord your God lives, I don't have any bread; only a handful of flour in a jar and a little
oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son that we might eat it and die."

Elijah tells her, "If you'll go ahead and make me a cake, that oil will never run dry, the flour will never run out." And this woman has got to think, you know: "What do I have to lose? I've lost my husband / I'm about to lose my son—I'm about to starve to death. I'll make a little smaller cake for me and my son and one for him, and let's give it a shot."

She does it and guess what? The words prove true—that oil never runs dry / the flour never runs out. I'm sure, for the first few days, she is just giddy with excitement—opens up the jar, just afraid maybe it's going to finally run out; but no—it's still there. She opens up the flour jar and she says: "I can't believe this! We should have run out weeks ago, and it's still here." But then time went on—time passed. Pretty soon, when she opened up the jar, she expected that there would be oil because there always was. She'd open up the flour and, of course, there's flour. There'd been flour there for months without putting anything in it.

Some time passed—we're told here, in verse 17, that it was sometime later. We don't know how long—at least months/perhaps years—but sometime later, her son became ill and died, not of starvation, but of another disease. Now, the widow is upset with Elijah. She goes back to him and says, "What good does it do me to have you spare my son from starvation if he's going to simply die of another disease?"

Elijah takes her son in the back—prays to the Lord on his behalf. The son is raised from the dead. Elijah presents the son to the woman. Overjoyed, she says to him, in verse 24, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the Word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth." "Now I know — she says—"you are a man of God, and the Word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

Now, I read this account of a woman who had been in desperate situations regarding her food. The first question I want to ask her is: "Now you know? Only now you finally believe that this is a man of God and that the Word of the Lord is true? What have you been eating for the last six months, if not two years, three times a day?—God has miraculously provided—but now you know?"

What happened? So often, God will surround us with blessings and miracles. When they first happen, we recognize them as blessings—we count them as miracles and we thank God for them. But, over time, those same blessings become common. Those same miracles become so familiar that we don't even recognize them as coming from the hand of God—we don't even recognize them as a cause of thanksgiving. It's just the
way things have always been. So, when one problem comes up, that's all we see is that one problem. We forget all that God has done. Our attitude is, "God, what new thing have You done for me lately?"

Now, let's look at this from another perspective—let's go forward about 1,000 years, give or take a century or so, to Matthew, Chapter 20—thinking, as we turn, about: “What common blessings might we be taking for granted this morning?” It may be even more basic than we realize as I think Matthew, Chapter 20, will tell us. Here, again, we have two very desperate people in need of a touch from God.

Matthew, Chapter 20, verse 29 says, “As Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, 'Lord, son of David, have mercy on us.' The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, 'Lord, son of David, have mercy on us!'"

The picture here is two men, who are being shushed by the crowd—they're saying: "Look! You're embarrassing us. This isn't how you act in public. Just be quiet—it's embarrassing!" But their need is so desperate. They don't care how foolish they look. They are filled with their heart's need. They are crying out because they see that's the only man that can meet that need: "Who cares what anybody says about us? 'Lord, son of David, have mercy on us!'"

So they finally get Jesus' attention. Verse 32, "Jesus stopped and called them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked." What a beautiful question! Imagine the God of the universe, in whom all power in heaven and earth is under His feet, looks you in the eye and says: "You know what? You have My attention. What do you want Me to do for you?"

I wonder—what would you say this morning if God were to stand in front of you and say: "You're here. You have My full attention. What do you want Me to do for you?" What would you ask for? What would you request? It's not a rhetorical question. I want you to think about it. What would be your first request if God were to say, "What is the one thing you want Me to do for you?"

I'm not sure that any of us would ask what these two blind men said: "Lord,"—they answered—"We want our sight." Why would we not ask for that?—because we already have it! But you know what? If we were to be involved in an accident, on the way home, and we were to lose our sight, and a week from now, God were to meet us with that question, "What do you want Me to do for you?"—our first thing that we would say
would be: "Lord, I want to see again. I want to see my wife / I want to see my husband. I want to see my kids or my grandkids. I want to be able to take a walk and look at the beauty of nature You've created. I want to be able to read Your Word. Lord, I want to see!"

Every day, we have this miracle of sight. Yet, how often do we thank God for that miracle? It's a common blessing—it's a familiar miracle. It can extend so much—it could be a house. If I was homeless, I think I would say: "Lord, I want a house. My kids are getting rained on. They're too hot in the summer / they're too cold in the winter. I want a house." I wouldn't say that now—I already have a house. It's a rather nice house, and so I don't think about that; but how often do I enter that house without saying, "Lord, thank You for this house! It might be familiar, but I'm so grateful for it."

It's not just the physical things that God gives us that we can be thankful for. It's the many spiritual blessings as well. I was driving down to Seattle a few weeks ago. I was listening to public radio, and they were interviewing the authors of a book called Religion for Dummies. I haven't read the book, but it was a priest and a rabbi that had written it together. Basically, they were reviewing the world's 11 major religions.

As they were talking about that, I remember thinking how blessed we are to know the truth, and the grace, and the forgiveness won for us on the cross. We just sang some beautiful songs of worship about how our guilt is laid on the cross, and we can stand strong in Christ and face death without fear.

Do you know how few people can say that?—none outside of Christianity! If we lived in a different age, and we sinned, we might have to go find a bull to kill or, at least, a couple of pigeons to wring their necks. There are some religions where they have no assurance of forgiveness. If they commit a sin, they've got to try to frantically do five or six good acts, hoping that they can outweigh it. Yet, we live in the assurance and the grace won for us on the cross of Jesus Christ. How often do we lose that awe?—that we can simply say to the Lord, "Lord, I've blown it," and know, without a doubt, that He's forgiven us and the blood of Jesus has covered our sins.

We live in an age where we're told to seek blessing after blessing—"God to increase this, and God to increase that." The Bible does, on occasion, in a couple of places, urge us to pray those prayers—that's a biblical prayer—but there are dozens of places where the Bible urges us to open our eyes to the blessings we've already received. Instead of always praying for more blessings, to say, "God, thank You for the many ways You've already blessed."
And this is an attitude toward life that goes far beyond our relationship with God. It can change our family lives as well. I was watching television this last September 11th, as I'm sure many of you were seeing some of the shows that were commemorating what had happened. My wife and I were watching a show. My wife had the remote control, which is why we were watching Barbara Walters. I'm not trying to slam anybody, but I just haven't met too many guys who see Barbara Walters on the screen and think that's where they need to stop.

Usually, we're thinking: "There's got to be SportsCenter somewhere. We'll just keep clicking." But my wife has the remote control on the other couch, so we're watching Barbara Walters. She's talking to the widows of 9/11. They said something that just made me just—I wish I'd been recording it but, of course, I couldn't imagine ever wanting to tape Barbara Walters and trying to watch it twice much less once.

But the comment that one of the widows said is—she said, "The one thing I can't stand anymore is when I hear wives continually criticizing their husbands." And two more women—all the widows were nodding their head. And one woman said, "It would make my day if my husband was home to leave the toilet seat up." She said, "I couldn't imagine anything better," because they now looked at their husbands in a different light instead of just seeing all the problems he brought—they saw the loss that they had.

I do a lot of marriage conferences since the book, *Sacred Marriage*, came out. I was at one, and there were a number of groups that were talking in between sessions. In one group, I could see some women talking; and one woman was getting more and more flustered.

There was a different woman, who was talking about the rock garden that her husband put in over a three-day weekend. She was waxing eloquently about the great workmanship that he had done, and how it looked so good, and the hours he had put in—and she was so proud of it and of him. You could see this woman getting more and more irritated, until she finally stopped and said: "Please stop! My husband spent all weekend watching a golf tournament. I don't need to hear about how your husband put in a rock garden."

I was talking to that woman later. I had talked to her husband, and I just asked her a couple of questions. I said: "Tell me about your house. Where do you live?" She said, "It's about 2,200 square feet. We have a good-sized lot for the kids." And I told her, "You must be very thankful that you're able to live there. I don't know where it's like here; but where I come from in Bellingham—2,200 square feet is not a mansion—but it's a decent-sized house. You must be very thankful." She said, "I guess so."
I said, "So where do you work?" She said: "I don't have to work. My husband earns enough. I'm able to stay home." I said: "Boy, you must be so thankful for that! Did you realize that 65 percent of the women in your situation have to work outside the home? You're one in three that gets to stay home. You must be very thankful." And she said, "I didn't think about it."

Then I asked her about the weekend. I had talked with her husband—so I had a little bit of inside information—I knew what he had done. On Monday, after the tournament, he had taken his son—his son was going to start playing T-ball—so he'd taken his son out to a field to teach him how to hit a ball off the T. That afternoon, he had taken the daughters to a movie and spent some good time with the daughters. On the way home from the theater, he was calling his wife, saying: "Do you need me to pick up something from the grocery store? I know you're getting dinner ready." She said, "Yes, actually, there are a few things I need." She gave him a few things; and he made the trip, and he came home.

After she tells me this, I looked at her; and I said, "Do you have any idea what a single mom would say if, for one day a week, a man came into her family and spent some guy-time with her boy and some healthy time with her daughters, and on the way home said, 'Hey, can I make a grocery stop for you?'" I said: "She would feel like she had died and gone to heaven. She would be on her knees that night saying, 'Thank You, Lord, for one day when it's not all on me and when I have something that I really need for my kids that I can't provide.'"

That woman looked at me, and I saw the recognition cover her face. She went over to her husband, and she kissed him on the forehead. He said, "What's that for?" She said, "For being you." She wanted to wring his neck a few minutes before that, but now she was thankful because she saw the common blessings.

Now, I'm going to be honest—if I was talking to the guy, I would say, "Look, guy, you know, all day watching golf—probably not a good thing to do." In fact, I think I could drop the word "probably." But so often, in our relationships, we look at what people aren't doing and forget what they do.

[Studio]

Bob: That is Gary Thomas talking about the common blessings in our lives that all of us take for granted.
Dennis: I think this is a great reminder because I think, in this land of affluence and plenty, that it’s so easy to find someone else who has more than you—or to find someone else’s marriage and family who is in better condition, it appears, than you. And I think this is just a great reminder for us to take this day and give thanks, but to also practice the art of gratitude and thanksgiving on a daily basis for the—as he put it—the little things that God gives you that you need to give thanks for.

Bob: Yes. I think this is something that we have to cultivate, as a practice in our lives, as a spiritual discipline. I think a lot of times, when it comes to the idea of giving thanks, we tend to think, “Well, you should only give thanks if you’re really feeling thankful or feeling grateful.”

But I think we need to recognize that the Bible tells us we need to train our hearts on how we should be responding to things in life. We need to cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving, even if we don’t feel it. I mean, I think of the passage in the Bible that says, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Let’s be honest, there are times we don’t feel like rejoicing; but the instruction of Scripture is that, even when you don’t feel like rejoicing, you need to train your heart to rejoice.

So, you cultivate an attitude of rejoicing or you cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving. This is something where we’re not just ruled by our passions, but where we have to instruct our emotions. I think of David, in the Psalms, when he says to his own soul, “Why are you so downcast, oh my soul?” And then he counsels his soul—he says, “Put your hope in God.” If you’re not feeling particularly thankful today, then we need to instruct our emotions that we ought to be thankful. There is much to be thankful for and to count those blessings.

I know for a lot of our listeners, there have been some difficult circumstances that you may have faced this year—the economy, job-related issues, family relationships, tragedies you’ve experienced in your family. But God still tells us to give thanks in all things. We have to train our hearts and minds to think rightly and to respond rightly to all that’s going on around us.

Think of Job who, in the midst of tragedy, said, “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” I know that your wife Barbara has created a resource that a lot of our listeners have already gotten. It’s a chalkboard that you can hang in your home. At the top, it says, “In this house we give thanks for” and then there’s a place to write down, every day, something new that you’re thankful for. It just helps to train us to look around and say, “We have a lot to be thankful for.” Whatever is going on in your life, there are still many things to be thankful for.
If our listeners are interested in finding out more about that chalkboard, they can go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link at the top of the page that says, “GO DEEPER.” There’s a picture of the chalkboard there. You can order it from us, online, if you’d like. Again, our website is FamilyLifeToday.com.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to explore some of the cultural trends related to gender and parenthood. Brad Wilcox will be back with us tomorrow. We’ll just see what the statistics are saying about how we are dealing with some of these issues. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. In fact, I am grateful for our entire broadcast production team. They do a great job, day in and day out. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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